



# NATHAN FLETCHER

## CHAIR

SUPERVISOR, FOURTH DISTRICT  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

### AGENDA ITEM

**DATE:** April 26, 2022

**01**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

#### **SUBJECT**

**ENSURING ADEQUATE AERIAL FIRE SUPPRESSION SUPPORT THROUGH THE ACQUISITION OF A TWIN-ENGINE HELICOPTER (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

#### **OVERVIEW**

Climate change has led to our region getting hotter and drier and the risk of serious wildfires continues to grow. We have seen historic fires throughout our state and the western United States in recent years and we must continue to do everything we can to adequately prepare for the very real risk of wildfire in San Diego. That includes taking every possible step to make sure that our first responders have the regional assets they need to fight fires on a 24-hour basis.

Aerial fire suppression during a wildfire is a critical component of the region's overall firefighting strategy. The current San Diego County aerial fleet consists of single-engine helicopters that are built out of 1960s and 1970s airframes. Twin-engine helicopters are more efficient at fighting fires as they have the ability to fly at night and carry a larger amount of water. The entire fleet of single-engine helicopters must eventually be replaced. Today's proposal, the acquisition of a twin-engine helicopter to add to the fleet, is the first step in this replacement plan.

The current fleet of helicopters used by San Diego County is manufactured by Bell. Operating a fleet of helicopters and equipment from a single manufacturer is more efficient and provides cost savings by standardizing flight training for pilots and costs for tooling and maintenance training.

This is a request to authorize the Director of the Department of Purchasing and Contracting to issue a competitive solicitation for the first acquisition, a single-source purchase, of one Bell 412 EPX helicopter, including outfitting. This is also a request to award new contracts and amend current contracts for Bell parts, components, repairs, and maintenance services, to award new contracts and amend current contracts for helicopter pilot and mechanic training and certifications, and to award new contracts and amend current contracts for the outfitting, parts, and components, and repair and maintenance of the Bell 412 EPX helicopter.

**SUBJECT:** ENSURING ADEQUATE AERIAL FIRE SUPPRESSION SUPPORT THROUGH THE ACQUISITION OF A TWIN-ENGINE HELICOPTER (DISTRICTS: ALL)

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER**

1. In accordance with Section 401, et. seq., of the County Administrative Code, authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to enter into negotiations with Bell; and subject to successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award a contract for one Bell 412 EPX Helicopter and outfitting with standardized Sheriff equipment, and to amend the contract as needed to reflect changes to services and funding, subject to the approval of the Sheriff.
2. In accordance with Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, approve and authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to enter into negotiations with Bell; and subject to successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award new contracts and amend current contracts for Bell Helicopter parts, components, outfitting and repairs and maintenance services for a five-year period.
3. In accordance with Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, approve and authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to enter negotiations with Bell; and subject to successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award new contracts and amend current contracts for helicopter pilot and mechanic training and certifications for a five-year period.
4. In accordance with Board Policy A-87, Competitive Procurement, approve and authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to enter into negotiations with Bell Authorized Distributors and Service Centers, Original Equipment Manufacturers such as FLIR, The Civil Aerospace Division of Rolls Royce, Pratt & Whitney and uniquely Specialized Federal Aviation Administration Repair Facilities, and subject to successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award new contracts and amend current contracts for the outfitting, parts and components, and repair and maintenance of the Sheriff's current and future fleet of helicopters, for a five year period to support the mission of the Sheriff's ASTREA (Aerial Support to Regional Enforcement Areas) Program. Contracts shall be amended as needed to reflect changes in services and funding, subject to the approval of the Sheriff.

**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Much of the unincorporated areas of San Diego County, where San Diego County Fire provides protection, consist of disadvantaged communities. We must ensure that these vulnerable communities are protected from the impacts of wildfires. Today's action to purchase a new twin-engine helicopter will help protect these areas and the entire region.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for this request will be included in the Fiscal Year 2022-23 CAO Operational Plan Change Letter in the Sheriff's Department. If approved, this will result in estimated costs and revenue of \$16.0 million. The funding sources are unassigned General Fund fund balance of \$8,000,000 resulting from expenditure savings and available Proposition 172 fund balance of \$8,000,000.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

Adequate fire protection protects the residential and business assets of the San Diego region.

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**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

**BACKGROUND**

Climate change has led to our region getting hotter and drier and the risk of serious wildfires continues to grow. We have seen historic fires throughout our state and the western United States in recent years and we must continue to do everything we can to adequately prepare for the very real risk of wildfire in San Diego. That includes taking every possible step to make sure that our first responders have the regional assets they need to fight fires on a 24-hour basis.

San Diego County Fire was formed in 2008 to unify the administrative support, communications, and training of 15 rural fire agencies and to extend around-the-clock protection to 1.5 million acres of the unincorporated county.

Aerial fire suppression during a wildfire provides a critical component of the region’s overall firefighting strategy. The current San Diego County aerial fleet consists of single-engine helicopters that are built out of 1960s and 1970s airframes. Single-engine helicopters have limited use during wildfires because they are unable to fly at night or carry adequate amounts of water. Night flying, which twin-engine helicopters make possible, is essential to first attack capabilities against a wildfire because it provides a substantial suppression effort that can potentially save lives and homes from out-of-control wildfires. Additionally, given the rugged terrain of much of east and north county, twin-engine capability is much safer than a single-engine helicopter for those who operate and work in the helicopters. Given the age, maintenance needs, and intensity of use, the County must begin to replace its three firefighting helicopters. Today’s proposal, the acquisition of a twin-engine helicopter to add to the fleet, is the first step in the replacement plan.

In San Diego County, we have a unique partnership between the San Diego Sheriff’s Department and Cal Fire when it comes to aerial fire suppression. This partnership came about after the 2003 Cedar Fire when after-action reports concluded the need for a more robust aerial regional strategy when it comes to wildfires. Due to the San Diego Sheriff’s Department infrastructure already in place through ASTREA (Aerial Support to Regional Enforcement Areas) which included pilots, equipment, and mechanics, the County began to purchase single-engine helicopters. Cal Fire entered into a cooperative agreement with San Diego County to provide state funding for staffing the helicopters while the County provides the helicopter and the pilot.

The current fleet of helicopters used by the San Diego Sheriff’s Department is manufactured by Bell. Operating a fleet of helicopters and equipment from common manufacturers offers several advantages. Most importantly, it enhances safety due to consistency in operations. Pilots do not have to be trained in major differences in flight characteristics, emergency procedures, and equipment operation from one type of aircraft to another. These differences can be very extreme. In emergency situations, where instantaneous reaction is required, pilots should not have to first consider which aircraft they are flying in order to select the appropriate response. The efficiency involved in having a fleet from a common manufacturer is gained through cost savings in standardized flight training for pilots, as well as tooling and maintenance training costs.

**SUBJECT: ENSURING ADEQUATE AERIAL FIRE SUPPRESSION SUPPORT THROUGH THE ACQUISITION OF A TWIN-ENGINE HELICOPTER (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

This proposed new helicopter and the existing Bell Helicopter fleet will require ongoing routine maintenance and on occasion, repairs from unforeseen damages. Bell Authorized Distributors and Service Centers, Original Equipment Manufacturers such as The Civil Aerospace Division of Rolls Royce, and uniquely Specialized Federal Aviation Administration Repair Facilities that specialize in the outfitting of components and equipment, as well as repair and maintenance of the Sheriff's standardized equipment shall be utilized in conjunction with the Sheriff's Bell Helicopters. Use of any other parts may compromise the safety, violate Federal Aviation Regulations, or void the warranty.

This is a request to authorize the Director of the Department of Purchasing and Contracting to issue a competitive solicitation for the single-source purchase of one Bell 412 EPX helicopter, including outfitting, over the next five years. This is also a request to award new contracts and amend current contracts for Bell parts, components, repairs, and maintenance services; to award new contracts and amend current contracts for helicopter pilot and mechanic training, and certifications; and to award new contracts and amend current contracts for the outfitting, parts, and components, and repair and maintenance of the Bell 412 EPX helicopter.

The Bell 412 is an ideal multi-use helicopter for both Search & Rescue operations (it's capable of a high-altitude hover) as well as firefighting due to its lift capacity. The helicopter will provide the San Diego County Fire Protection District with the capability for night flying when personnel, policies, and training are complete and in place. The expected delivery time is 18 months after the purchase order.

Today's action would authorize the Director of the Department of Purchasing and Contracting to enter into negotiations with Bell, and subject to successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award a contract for one Bell 412 EPX Helicopter, appropriate parts, components, maintenance, and training.

I urge your support.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed action to acquire a twin-engine helicopter for regional fire suppression supports the Sustainability and Community Strategic Initiatives of the 2022-27 Strategic Plan by providing our region with the assets necessary to best protect San Diego County from wildfires.

Respectfully submitted,

NATHAN FLETCHER  
Supervisor, Fourth District

**ATTACHMENT(S)**  
N/A